

AUDET & PARTNERS, LLP
221 Main Street, Suite 1460
San Francisco, CA 94105
Attorneys for Plaintiff Bonier

[Additional Counsel on Signature Page]

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY**

IN RE PET FOODS PRODUCTS)	MDL No. 1850
LIABILITY LITIGATION)	Master Docket: 07 CV 2867 (NLH)(AMD)
)	ALL CASES
)	

**NATIONAL PLAINTIFFS' CONSOLIDATED
REPLY TO THE APPLICATION FOR LEAD COUNSEL
SUBMITTED BY THE BERGER/WEXLER GROUP**

**NATIONAL PLAINTIFFS' REPLY TO THE
BERGER/WEXLER LEAD COUNSEL MOTION**

I
INTRODUCTION

All of the attorneys currently applying for lead counsel in this case have been appointed to leadership positions in the past and have proved themselves capable of serving in lead positions in certain class cases. This is not in dispute. Neither the Consumer Counsel Group nor the Berger/Wexler Group has argued that any of the applicants fail to satisfy the requisites for leadership of Rule 23(g). The question is which attorneys will best serve the plaintiffs in this case, based on past similar experience and real commitment to the case thus far. As previously detailed, the Consumer Counsel Group believes that the three-way proposed structure of Attorneys William M. Audet, Scott A. Kamber, and Jay Edelson should be selected by this Court to lead in this case.

As the case has recently progressed, however, it has also become clear that where these two Groups are equally represented, the class members have already been well served on a host of important issues. In fact, representatives of the two Groups have been working together over the last several months and this cooperation has accelerated since the filing of the initial applications for lead counsel. Specifically, in the last two weeks alone, a host of major issues have been the subject of difficult negotiations between plaintiffs, on the one side, and defendants, on the other side. The combined efforts of the smaller representatives of the two Groups have also brought the case to the eve of mediation. At this time, the only conclusion that can fairly be reached is that, when equally represented, the class has been well-served by the combined expertise that the two Groups have brought to the table.

Accordingly, in the interest of the class and the clients, the Consumer Counsel Group respectfully requests that the Court appoint a four-way leadership structure, with two attorneys from the Berger/Wexler Group and two attorneys from the Consumer Counsel

Group.¹ While the Consumer Counsel Group remains confident in its abilities (and its chance of being appointed lead), reflection on all that the two Groups have accomplished together, it seems disingenuous to upset the apple cart by totally excluding all representation from the Berger/Wexler Group. While such perspective does not come easily, it seems that this result is truly in the best interests of the class.

II ARGUMENT

A. UNDISPUTED FACTS

The respective submissions of the Berger/Wexler Group and the Consumer Counsel Group establish, *inter alia*, that:

First, the Consumer Counsel Group's proposed lead attorneys have significant and unique experience in both consumer class actions and mass tort litigation.

Second, the Consumer Counsel Group has established that they more than adequately satisfy the applicable criteria under Rule 23(g) and the *Manual for Complex Litigation* (4th):

- Work on the Case – Here, as noted in the prior submissions, each of the proposed leads have made significant contributions in identifying potential claims against each of the Menu Foods defendants.
- Counsel Experience in Handling Similar Claims – with due respect to the qualifications of the other attorneys, this factor clearly favors the Consumer Counsel Group's proposed lead. Proposed Lead William M. Audet has had significant experience in other similar MDL cases, such as *Baycol* (PSC), *Bextra* (PSC), and *Guidant* (PSC). Indeed, Mr. Audet has the somewhat unique distinction of significant prior mass tort / class action experience. Proposed Lead Scott A. Kamber is uniquely qualified based on his prior significant consumer class action work. While the Berger/Wexler Group correctly identified instances of Court citations to Mr. Kamber's work in the area of securities litigation, his work in consumer class actions is actually far more extensive. From his work on the defense-side during the 1990's to his leadership in recent high-profile national consumer class actions

¹ With due respect to the McLaughlin application, their "Hail Mary pass" attempt to seek appointment to the leadership is utterly without support. With the exception of the McLaughlin application for lead, the McLaughlin attorneys have not been heard from in this case until the deadline for lead application. They have no significant client base and no support for leadership. They are not equal in any respect to the other two Groups seeking a leadership position in this case.

such as *In re Sony CD Technologies Litig.*, Mr. Kamber has consistently demonstrated his expertise in the successful and timely resolution of consumer class actions. Finally, Proposed Lead Jay Edelson has not only a significant number of clients and contacts, but has shown his commitment to other consumer class actions in the past. Mr. Edelson has served as lead in numerous state and federal class actions and has demonstrated a particular expertise in the litigation of cases involving statutory damages.

- Resources – Without doubt, the National Plaintiffs' three proposed Co-Lead Counsel have more than adequate resources at their disposal to prosecute this case against the defendants. Moreover, the issue is not just use of existing resources, but efficient management of the case to ensure maximum recovery for the clients and class members. While no one will dispute that several of the firms comprising the Berger/Wexler Group are larger, no one has questioned the ability of any member of the Consumer Counsel Group to bring adequate resources to bear to successfully litigate this action. Since all counsel who have applied for lead satisfy this prong of Rule 23(g), the fact that several firms may be larger is of no relevance.
- Work Cooperatively – Despite the Consumer Counsel Group's disagreement with the "management" style of the Berger/Wexler Group, they also have had no problem working together on a host of early pretrial issues. This temporary working relationship has allowed the case to move forward despite the disagreement over the "lead counsel" issues.

Third, the proposed leads of the Consumer Counsel Group were, at least initially, solely invited to "early discussions" with defense counsel based on their significant individual client base (and past work experiences with certain defense counsel in other cases). The Consumer Counsel Group had no objection to including representation from the Berger/Wexler Group in the later meetings. By so doing, the Consumer Counsel Group again showed its commitment to put leadership posturing aside for the benefit of the class.

Fourth, the proposed three-way lead structure for the Consumer Counsel Group was the result of hard work and dedication to the early phases of this case. In compliance with the *Manual for Complex Litigation* (4th), the initial motion for lead counsel was accompanied by declarations stating that, *inter alia*, no promises of work or committee assignments had been offered to any firms in exchange for any support for lead. To date, this has not been done by the Berger/Wexler Group.

Fifth, well before the ill-fated Chicago "Ballroom" meeting, the four proposed firms of the Berger/Wexler group apparently agreed — essentially amongst themselves — to a "four way" structure for lead. The so-called "majority" support was obtained by acting as if this internal agreement was essentially a court-sanctioned leadership structure.

Sixth, not one of the proposed leads in the Berger/Wexler Group has their own significant client base. Instead, it appears that their "significant" numbers of clients have actually been retained by "supporter" firms and they never comprised the "majority" originally claimed.²

Seventh, the record (as opposed to self-supporting rhetoric) establishes that the three lead counsel of the Consumer Counsel Group have contributed as much as, if not more than, their counterparts in the Berger/Wexler Group toward the progress of the cases so far. The latter group has felt the need to dramatically overstate its accomplishments to the point that they seek to portray themselves as the "only attorneys" actually working on the case. In fact, the so-called "early discussions" with the defendants, the full damage analysis, and the significant progress of the plaintiffs in the early phases of the investigation of claims in the case resulted from the efforts of the attorneys in the Consumer Counsel Group. Moreover, class members have "voted" with their retainer agreements: The three leads of the Consumer Counsel Group currently represent in excess of two thousand actual clients, more than any other firm or collection of firms.

B. COURTS APPOINT ATTORNEYS – *NOT LAW FIRMS* – TO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN MDL CASES.

In addition to making a number of inappropriate, false and gratuitous attacks on attorneys Scott Kamber and Jay Edelson, the Berger/Wexler Group asserts that, because its

² The Berger/Wexler Group is apparently unsure how many clients it really has, although its initial papers affirmatively claimed that they had the "majority" of clients.

member firms are bigger, they are necessarily “better.” These attacks and arguments are without merit.

Efforts to discredit Kamber and Edelson’s work and previous experiences lack any basis. Mr. Kamber’s experience includes work on securities cases, yet the Berger/Wexler Group’s papers completely ignore the numerous consumer class actions detailed in both Mr. Kamber’s declaration and firm resume. As detailed in Mr. Kamber’s declaration in the initial application, his work in the area of consumer class actions dates back to the early 1990’s, when he worked at a well known defense firm. Mr. Kamber’s work continued on the plaintiffs side, where he served as lead counsel in numerous consumer cases (first at the firm Wechsler Harwood, LLP, and then at Kamber & Associates, LLC, a firm he founded almost three years ago). Indeed, several members of the Berger/Wexler Group have personal knowledge that Mr. Kamber recently served as lead counsel in the *In re Sony CD Technologies Litig.*, a case that was resolved in a manner universally praised and recognized as a major achievement in consumer class actions. Ironically, Mr. Kamber and his firm have been supported as lead counsel in other consumer cases by some of the largest plaintiffs firms in the country. For anyone to suggest that Mr. Kamber is an “unknown” commodity in the area of consumer class actions is disingenuous at best.

Similarly, the Berger/Wexler Group seek to fault Mr. Edelson for being “in the media,” as if that were the result of grandstanding rather than appropriate coverage of the current status of the case. Press coverage of developments in which Mr. Edelson played a key role (such as the work on the consent decree issued by this Court or the assertion of significant new legal theories aimed at vitiating the defendants’ potential arguments) has helped keep this case and the clients’ claims in the spotlight.

The Berger/Wexler Group also uses its “characterizations” of Kamber and Edelson’s qualifications as the basis for what they believe is their “trump” argument: the comparative size of its own member firms. The Berger/Wexler Group treats the size of its member law firms as reason alone to be appointed lead counsel. But, as most courts agree, attorneys — not law firms — are appointed to leadership positions in class actions and mass torts.

Nowhere in either Rule 23(g), or the *Manual for Complex Litigation* (4th), does it state that the attorney must (or even should) work for the “biggest law firm.” If this were the case, only the two or three larger firms would be appointed lead in every case. This is not what the Federal Rules intended, nor is it how courts have interpreted them. While the Berger/Wexler Group expends much of its energy emphasizing the purportedly greater size of its law firms, this is not the standard for lead appointment. The proposed lead firms of the Consumer Counsel Group have served as lead in many complex class action litigations in the past, and have the skills and resources to best lead this litigation.

In short, this Court must have faith that the individual attorneys it appoints, rather than the firms the attorneys are currently associated with, are capable and committed to representing the class members. If one takes the Berger/Wexler Group’s premise to its logical conclusion, the Court’s role in evaluating and appointing lead counsel would be reduced to comparing the net worth and the number of attorneys of the competing firms on the “principle” that bigger is better. Indeed, if this were true, the examination of an attorney’s efforts and substantive qualifications would fall by the wayside.³

C. “DEAL OR NO DEAL”

Notably absent (again) from the Berger/Wexler Group’s opposition papers is any discussion of any deals, promises, or commitments (of, say, committee positions or of

³ Ironically, under such a regime, neither Mr. Wexler’s nor Mr. Berman’s firm would ever stand a chance if they were in competition with their current ally, the Coughlin firm.

division of work) among the proposed leads themselves or between the leads and any of their supporting forms. As outlined in the *Manual for Complex Litigation* (4th) (and discussed in prior submissions), any promises (implicit or explicit) must be disclosed to the Court.

Whether it is a promise to "include" certain attorneys in mediation discussions or commitments of any nature, the Court should be aware of all commitments as it considers any group's proposed leadership role. While the initial declarations of Attorneys Kamber, Audet and Edelson set forth the fact that the Consumer Counsel Group has made no such deals, no such declaration has ever been submitted by members of the Berger/Wexler Group.

III **CONCLUSION**

The Consumer Counsel Group has shown that under applicable criteria they are the best choice for lead counsel. At this juncture, however, we respectfully submit that the best solution is for the Court to appoint two members from each of the two Groups.⁴ In choosing an equal number of members from both the Consumer Counsel Group and from the Berger/Wexler Group, the Court will ensure the continuing progress of the litigation.

⁴ The Consumer Counsel Group is prepared to propose to the Court the two attorneys who they recommend to serve as co-lead from the Consumer Counsel Group.

Dated: September 19, 2007

By: S/ William M. Audet

William M. Audet

AUDET & PARTNERS, LLP

221 Main Street, Suite 1460

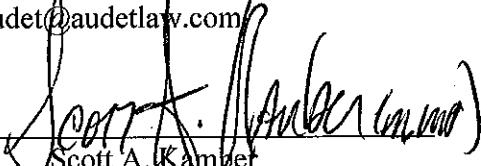
San Francisco, CA 94105

Telephone: (415) 568-2555

Facsimile: (415) 568-2556

waudet@audetlaw.com

By:


Scott A. Kamber**KAMBER & ASSOCIATES, LLC**

11 Broadway, 22d Floor

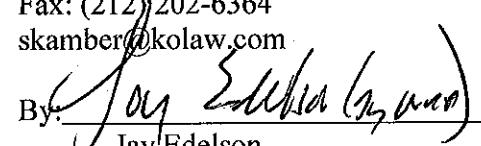
New York, NY 10004

Telephone: (212) 920-3072

Fax: (212) 202-6364

skamber@kolaw.com

By:


Jay Edelson**BLIM & EDELSON, LLC**

53 West Jackson Blvd., Suite 1642

Chicago, IL 60604

Telephone: (312) 913-9400

Facsimile: (312) 913-9401

jay@blimlaw.com

[Proposed] Lead Counsel

	Joined by:
Kelly Finestone, C.D. Cal., 07-cv-2338	Thomas Ferlauto KING & FERLAUTO, LLP 1880 Century Park East, Suite 820 Los Angeles, CA 90067-1627 Telephone: (310) 552-3366 Facsimile: (310) 552-3289 tmf@kingferlauto.com
James Conner, D.N.J., 07-cv-1623	Jonathan Shub SEEGER WEISS, LLP 1515 Market Street, Suite 1380 Philadelphia, PA 19102 Telephone: (215) 564-2300 Facsimile: (215) 851-8029 jshub@sheller.com

James Conner, D.N.J., 07-cv-1623	Christopher A. Seeger Scott Alan George SEEGER WEISS, LLP 550 Broad Street Suite 920 Newark, NJ 07102 Telephone: (973) 639-9100 Facsimile: (973) 639-9393 cseeger@seegerweiss.com sgeorge@seegerweiss.com
Dawn Howe, C.D. Cal, 07-cv-2060 Dennis Lee Townsend and Glenna Townsend, C.D. Cal, 07-cv-0398 Mark Golding, D.N.J., 07-cv-1521 Alexander Nunez, D.N.J., 07-cv-1490 Richard Chamberlain, D.N.J., 07-cv-4064	Jeff S. Westerman Sabrina S. Kim MILBERG WEISS & BERSHAD, LLP One California Plaza 300 South Grand Avenue, Suite 3900 Los Angeles, CA 90071 Telephone: (213) 617-1200 Facsimile: (213) 617-1975 jwesterman@milbergweiss.com skim@milbergweiss.com
Janice Bonier, D.N.J., 07-cv-1477 Leslie Berndl, D.N.J., 07-cv-1553	Michael A. Ferrara, Jr. THE FERRARA LAW FIRM, LLC 601 Longwood Avenue at State Highway 38 Cherry Hill, NJ 08002 Telephone: (856) 779-9500 Facsimile: (856) 661-0369 mferrara@ferraralawfirm.com
Kirby Cooper, W.D. Ark., 07-cv-4036 Charles Ray Sims et al., D.N.J., 07-cv-3156 Schwinger, D.N.J., 07-cv-3435	Jason M. Hatfield LUNDY & DAVIS, LLP 300 N. College Avenue, Suite 309 Fayetteville, AR 72701 Telephone: (479) 527-3921 Facsimile: (479) 587-9196 jhatfield@lundydavis.com
Johnson, D.N.J., 07-cv-1610, (C.D. Cal. 07-cv-1987)	Michael L. Kelly Behram V. Parekh KIRTLAND & PACKARD, LLP 2361 Rosecrans Avenue, Fourth Floor El Segundo, CA 90245 Telephone: 310-536-100 Facsimile: 310-536-1001 mlk@kirtlandpackard.com bvp@kirtlandpackard.com

**NATIONAL PLAINTIFFS' REPLY TO THE
BERGER/WEXLER AND MC LAUGHLIN LEAD COUNSEL MOTION**

Lois Grady, Kaye Steinsapir, Barbara Gonzales, Frank Bodeman, and Craig Anderson, Individually and on Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated, D.N.J., 07-cv-4137 (C.D. Cal., 07-cv-2253)	Gregory D. Helmer Andrew H. Friedman HELMER FRIEDMAN, LLP 723 Ocean Front Walk Venice, California 90291 Tel. 310-396-7714 Fax 310-396-9215 afriedman@helmerfriedman.com ghelmer@helmerfriedman.com
Lois Grady, Kaye Steinsapir, Barbara Gonzales, Frank Bodeman, and Craig Anderson, Individually and on Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated, D.N.J., 07-cv-4137 (C.D. Cal., 07-cv-2253)	Paul L. Hoffman, SBN 071244 Michael D. Seplow, SBN 150183 Michael S. Morrison, SBN 205320 SCHONBRUN DE SIMONE SEPLOW HARRIS & HOFFMAN, LLP 723 Ocean Front Walk Venice, CA 90291 Telephone: (310) 396-0731 Facsimile: (310) 399-7040 hoffpaul@aol.com mseplow@aol.com lenbruce@yahoo.com
Mary DiCaprio, W.D. P.A., 07-cv-0734	Robert N. Peirce III D. Aaron Rihn ROBERT PEIRCE & ASSOCIATES, P.C. 2500 Gulf Tower 707 Grant Street Pittsburgh, PA 15219 Telephone: 1-800-543-9859 Facsimile: (412) 281-4229 rpeircejr@peircelaw.com arihn@peircelaw.com
Carol Brown D.N.J., 07-cv-3423	Peter N. Wasyluk LAW OFFICES OF PETER N. WASYLYK 1307 Chalkstone Ave. Providence, RI 02908 Telephone: (410) 831-7730 Facsimile: (401) 861-6064
Carol Brown D.N.J., 07-cv-3423	Andrew S. Kierstead LAW OFFICE OF ANDREW S. KIERSTEAD 1001 SW Fifth Ave. Suite 1100 Portland, OR 97204 Telephone: (508) 224-6246 Facsimile: (508) 224-4356 ajkier@aol.com

**NATIONAL PLAINTIFFS' REPLY TO THE
BERGER/WEXLER AND MCLAUGHLIN LEAD COUNSEL MOTION**

Carol Brown D.N.J., 07-cv-3423	Marc Stanley STANLEY, MANDEL & IOLA, LLP 3100 Monticello Avenue, Suite 750 Telephone: (214) 443-4300 Facsimile: (214) 443-0358 mstanley@smi-law.com
Jayne Englander D.N.J., 07-cv-4062	David C. Parisi PARISI & HAVENS, LLP 15233 Valleyheart Drive Sherman Oaks, CA 91403 Telephone: (818) 990-1299 Facsimile: (818) 501-7852 dparisi@parisihavens.com

1 **PROOF OF SERVICE**
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3 **MDL 1850**
4

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6 **FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY**
7

8 I am employed in the County of San Francisco, State of California; my business address is 221
9 Main Street, Suite 1460, San Francisco, California 94105. I am over the age of 18 and not a party
10 to the within action. On this date I served the following documents:
11

12 **NATIONAL PLAINTIFFS' CONSOLIDATED**
13 **REPLY TO THE APPLICATION FOR LEAD COUNSEL**
14 **SUBMITTED BY THE BERGER/WEXLER GROUP; and**
15

16 **PROOF OF SERVICE**
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18 on the parties shown below:
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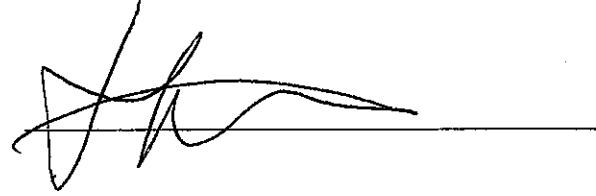
20 **See Attached**
21

22 X

23 (BY ELECTRONIC FILING) On this date I provided the documents(s) listed above
24 electronically through the Court's electronic filing service provider pursuant to the
25 instructions on that website.
26

27 I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the above is
28 true and correct.
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30 Executed on this 19th day of September, 2007 at San Francisco, California.
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MICHAEL DONOVAN DONOVAN SEARLES, LLC 1845 WALNUT STREET SUITE 1100 PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103	SHERRIE R. SAVETT BERGER & MONTAGUE, PC 1622 LOCUST STREET PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103
A. JAMES ANDREWS NICOLE BASS 905 LOCUST STREET KNOXVILLE, TN 37902	PERRY A. CRAFT CRAFT & SHEPPARD, PLC THE SHILOH BUILDING 214 CENTER VIEW DRIVE SUITE 223 BRENTWOOD, TN 37027
STEVE W. BERMAN HAGENS BERMAN SOBOL SHAPIRO, LLP 1301 FIFTH AVENUE SUITE 2900 SEATTLE, WA 98101	JENIPHR A.E. BRECKENRIDGE 13015 TH AVENUE SUITE 2900 SEATTLE, WA 98101
JOHN BLIM BLIM & EDELSON, LLC 53 WEST JACKSON BLVD., SUITE 1642 CHICAGO, IL 60604	GINO L. DIVITO 209 SOUTH LASALLE STREET 7TH FLOOR CHICAGO, IL 60604
JAY EDELSON 53 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD SUITE 1642 CHICAGO, IL 60604	PERRY A. CRAFT CRAFT & SHEPPARD, PLC THE SHILOH BUILDING 214 CENTER VIEW DRIVE SUITE 223 BRENTWOOD, TN 37027
STUART A. DAVIDSON COUGHLIN STOIA GELLER RUDMAN & ROBBINS LLP 120 EAST PALMETTO PARK ROAD SUITE 500 BOCA RATON, FL 33432-4809	LAWRENCE M. KOPELMAN 350 E LAS OLAS BOULEVARD SUITE 980 FORT LAUDERDALE, FL 33301
JOSEPH J. DEPALMA LITE, DEPALMA, GREENBERG & RIVAS, LLC TWO GATEWAY CENTER 12TH FLOOR NEWARK, NJ 07102-5003	ROBERT R. KURTZ DAN C. STANLEY STANLEY & KURTZ, PLLC 422 GAY STREET, 3RD STREET KNOXVILLE, TN 37902
KIMBERLY M. DONALDSON BENJAMIN F. JOHNS CHIMICLES & TIKELLIS 361 WEST LANCASTER AVENUE HAVERFORD, PA 19041	MICHAEL A. FERRARA, JR. THE FERRARA LAW FIRM 601 LONGWOOD AVENUE CHERRY HILL, NJ 08002

<p>ANDREW H. FRIEDMAN PAUL L. HOFFMAN GREGORY D. HELMER MICHAEL S. MORRISON MICHAEL D. SEPLOW SCHONBRUN DESIMONE SEPLOW HARRIS & HOFFMAN 723 OCEAN FRONT WALK VENICE, CA 90291</p>	<p>HAROLD M. HEWELL 402 WEST BROADWAY FOUTH FLOOR SAN DIEGO, CA 92101</p>
<p>SCOTT A. GEORGE SEEGER WEISS, LLP 550 BROAD STREET SUITE 920 NEWARK, NJ 07102</p>	<p>GARY S. GRAIFMAN KANTROWITZ, GOLDHAMER & GRAIFMAN, ESQS. 210 SUMMIT AVENUE MONTVALE, NJ 07645</p>
<p>BRUCE DANIEL GREENBERG LITE, DEPALMA, GREENBERG & RIVAS, LLC TWO GATEWAY CENTER 12TH FLOOR NEWARK, NJ 07102</p>	<p>JASON MATTHEW HATFIELD 300 NORTH COLLEGE AVENUE SUITE 309 FAYETTEVILLE, AR 72701</p>
<p>BRADLEY T. HAYES 804 STATE STREET NATCHEZ, MS 39120</p>	<p>SUZANNE HAVENS BECKMAN DAVID C. PARISI PARISI AND HAVENS 15233 VALLEYHEART DRIVE SHERMAN OAKS, CA 91403</p>
<p>DAVID A. PAYNE 607 MAIN STREET CASSVILLE, MO 65625</p>	<p>JEREMY Y. HUTCHINSON JACK T. PATTERSON, II PATTON, ROBERTS, MCWILLIAMS & CAPSHAW, LLP STEPHENS BUILDING 111 CENTER STREET, SUITE 1315 LITTLE ROCK, AR 72201</p>
<p>TIMOTHY CHAD HUTCHINSON WILLIAMS & HUTCHINSON LLP 5417 PINNACLE POINT DRIVE SUITE 500 ROGERS, AR 72758</p>	<p>LEISA B. PEARLMAN RICHARD A. ADAMS SEAN F. ROMMEL JAMES C. WLY PATTON, ROBERTS, MCWILLIAMS & CAPSHAW, LLP 2900 ST. MICHAEL DRIVE, SUITE 400 P.O. BOX 6128 TEXARKANA, TX 75505-6128</p>
<p>BENJAMIN F. JOHNS CHIMICLES & TLKELLIS, LLP ONE HAVERFORD CENTRE 361 WEST LANCASTER AVENUE HAVERFORD, PA 19041</p>	<p>ADAM P. KARP ANIMAL LAW OFFICES 114 WEST MAGNOLIA STREET SUITE 425 BELLINGHAM, WA 98225</p>

SETH R. LESSER LAW OFFICES OF GENE LOCKS, PLLC 457 HADDONFIELD ROAD SUITE 500 CHERRY HILL, NJ 08002	ALLYN ZISSEL LITE LITE, DEPALMA, GREENBERG & RIVAS, LCC TWO GATEWAY CENTER 12TH FLOOR NEWARK, NJ 07102-5003
ALAN C. MILSTEIN SHERMAN, SILVERSTEIN, KOHL, ROSE & PODOLSKY, PC FAIRWAY CORPORATE CENTER 4300 HADDONFIELD ROAD SUITE 311 PENNSAUKEN, NJ 08109	MICHAEL DAVID MYERS MYERS & CO., P.L.L.C. 1809 SEVENTH AVENUE SUITE 700 SEATTLE, WA 98101
BRUCE E. NEWMAN 99 NORTH ST., RTE 6 P.O. BOX 575 BRISTOL, CT 66011-0575	KEVIN EDWARD CREED PO BOX 575 BRISTOL, CT 06011-0575
WILLIAM J. PINILIS KAPLAN FOX & KILSHIMER LLP 237 SOUTH STREET MORRISTOWN, NJ 07962	DANIEL L. ROTTINGHAUS BERNING & WELL 3240 STONE VALLEY ROAD WEST ALAMO, CA 94507
FFIFFREY B. CEREGHINO 3240 STONE VALLEY ROAD WEST ALAMO, CA 94507	NICOLE DORSKY FFIREMY GILMAN 200 PUBLIC SQUARE #2300 CLEVELAND, OH 44114-2378
ALAN E. SASH MCLAUGHLIN & STERN, LLP. 260 MADISON AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10016	JOSEPH G. SAUDER CHIMICLES & TIKELLIS, LLP ONE HAVERFORD CENTRE 361 WEST LANCASTER AVENUE HAVERFORD, PA 19041
JAMES C. SHAH SHEPHERD, FINKELMAN, MILLER & SHAH, LLC 475 WHITE HORSE PIKE COLLINGSWOOD, NJ 08107-1909	SCOTT RHEAD SHEPHERD GREENFIELD & RIFKIN, ESQS. SOLS. BISCAYNE BOULEVARD SUITE 301 WEST PALM BEACH, FL 33401
KEITH T. SMITH RIDGEWOOD PLAZA 2327 NEW ROAD SUITE 202 NORTHFIELD, NJ 08234	GREGG D. TRAUTMANN TRAUTMANN & ASSOCIATES, LLC 262 EAST MAIN STREET ROCKAWAY, NJ 07866
KENNETH A. WEXLER WEXLER TORISEVA WALLACE ONE N. LASALLE STREET SUITE 2000 CHICAGO, IL 60602	JENNIFER REBA THOMAIDIS 1866 VINE STREET DENVER, CO 80206

RENE LYNN BARGE 11111 SANTA MONICA BOULEVARD LOS ANGELES, CA 90025	KATHERINE J. ODENBREIT 13123 GARDEN LAND ROAD LOS ANGELES, CA 90049
ERIC BENINK 625 BROADWAY SUITE 635 SAN DIEGO, CA 92101	MICHAEL R. BOSSE LEONARD M. GULINO DANIEL J. MITCHELL THEODORE A. SMALL BERNSTEIN SHUR 100 MIDDLE STREET P.O. BOX 9729 PORTLAND, ME 04104-5029
J. CHAD MOORE 270 MARKET STREET MILLERSBURG, PA 17061	ILAN J. CHOROWSKY 1130 NORTYH DEARBORN STREET SUITE 3110 CHICAGO, IL 60610
LARRY D. DRURY TWO NORTH LASALLE STREET SUITE 700 CHICAGO, IL 60602	FRANK JABLONSKI PROGRESSIVE LAW GROUP, LLC 354 WEST MAIN STREET MADISON, WI 53703
JAMES LEE DAVIDSON LERACH COUGHLIN 120 EAST PALMETTO PARK ROAD SUITE 500 BOCA RATON, FL 33432	PAUL J. GELLER COUGHLIN STOIA GELLERRUDMAN & ROBBINS 197 S FEDERAL HIGHWAY SUITE 200 BOCA RATON, FL 33432
JOHN G. EMERSON SCOTT E. POYNTER CHRISTOPHER D. JENNINGS 500 PRESIDENT CLINTON AVENUE SUITE 305 LITTLE ROCK, AR 72207	ROBERT A. JIGARJIAN JIGARJIAN LAW OFFICE 128 TUNSTEAD AVENUE SAN ANSELMO, CA 94960
SHAWN A. WILLIAMS 100 PINE STREET SUITE 2600 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111	PAUL GORDON 650 SOUTH CHERRY STREET SUITE 835 DENVER, CO 80246
DANIEL E. GUSTAFSON 650 NORTHSTAR EAST 608 SECOND AVENUE SOUTH MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55402	MICHAEL L. STOKER 205 FIFTH AVENUE SOUTH SUITE 600 P.O. BOX 1626 LA CROSSE, WI 54602-1626

<p>STUART C. TALLEY KERSHAW CUTTER & RATINOFF LLP 980 9TH STREET 19TH FLOOR SACRAMENTO, CA 95814</p>	<p>DENNIS E. MURRAY, SR. JOHN T. MURRAY LESLIE O. MURRAY MURRAY & MURRAY 111 EAST SHORELINE DRIVE PO BOX 19 SANDUSKY, OH 44871-0019</p>
<p>GREGORY M. NESPOLE MARTIN E. RESTITUYO WOLF, HALDENSTEIN, ADLER, FREEMAN & HERZ, LLP 270 MADISON AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10016</p>	<p>STEVEN E. SCHWARZ 2461 W. FOSTER AVE, #1 W CHICAGO, IL 60625</p>
<p>PETER N. WASYLYK 1307 CHALKSTONE AVENUE PROVIDENCE, RI 02908</p>	<p>JEFF S. WESTERMAN CHERYL A. WILLIAMS SABRINA S. KIM MILBERG WEISS LLP ONE CALIFORNIA PLAZA 300 SOUTH GRAND AVENUE SUITE 3900 LOS ANGELES, CA 90071</p>
<p>STEVEN F. GOOBY DLA PIPER US LLP 379 THORNALL STREET 8TH FLOOR PO BOX 2940 EDISON, NJ 08837-2226</p>	<p>CARLOS F. ORTIZ DLA, PIPER, RUDNICK, GRAY & CARY, LLP 1251 AVENUE OF THE AMERLCAS NEW YORK, NY 10020-1104</p>
<p>SUSAN MORLARTY HACK 401 WEST A STREET SUITE 2600 SAN DIEGO, CA 92101</p>	<p>ROBERTD. MCINTOSH ADORNO & YOSS, PA 888 SE 3RD AVENUE SUITE 500 FORT LAUDERDALE, FL 33335</p>
<p>JEFFREY T. KESTLE GARY A. TRABOLSI 2200 6TH AVENUE STE600 SEATTLE, WA 98121</p>	<p>GERARD H. HANSON HILL WALLACK 202 CARNEGIE CENTER PRINCETON, NJ 08543-5226</p>
<p>MATTHEW J. DUCHEMIN P.O. BOX 2113 33 EAST MAIN STREET SUITE 900 MADISON, WI 53701-2113</p>	<p>RACHEL LAINE CARNAGGIO GODFREY & LAPUYADE 9557 S. KINGSTON COURT ENGLEWOOD, CO 80112</p>

PAUL C. CATSOS THOMPSON & BOWIE 3 CANAL PLAZA P.O. BOX 4630 PORTLAND, ME 04112	THOMAS J. CABRAL JENNIFER L. MCKEEGAN 7TH FLOOR BULKLEY BUILDING 1501 EUCLID AVENUE CLEVELAND, OH 44115
MORDECAI D. BOONE CARRIE ANN LUBINSKI 275 BATTERY STREET 20TH FLOOR SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111	THOMAS ANGELONE ONE TURKS HEAD PLACE SUITE 1050 PROVIDENCE, RI 02903
D. JEFFREY IRELAND BRIAN D. WRIGHT FARUKI, IRELAND & COX, P.L.L. 500 COURTHOUSE PLAZA, S.W. 10 NORTH LUDLOW STREET DAYTON, OH 45402	STEVEN J. MERKER 370 17TH STREET REPUBLIC PLAZA BUILDING #4700 DENVER, CO 80202-5647
JAMES E. HOWARD EVAN L. SCHWAB 1420 5TH AVE STE 3400 SEATTLE, WA 98101	JEFFREY M. WHITE PIERCE, ATWOOD LLP ONE MONUMENT SQUARE PORTLAND, ME 04101-1110
PAULF. LINN MICHAEL BEST & FRIEDRICH, LLP 100 EAST WISCONSIN AVENUE, #3300 MILWAUKEE, WI 53202	ALLISON BETH NEIDOFF ONE PENNSYLVANIA PLAZA 37TH FLOOR NEW YORK, NY 212-649-4753
KIM M. CATULLO GIBBONS, DEL DEO, DOLAN, GRIFFINGER & VECCHIONE, PC ONE RIVERFRONT PLAZA NEWARK, NJ 07102-5496	DON HOWARTH SUZELLE M. SMITH 523 WEST SIXTH STREET SUITE 728 LOS ANGELES, CA 90014
FRANCIS M. HADDEN GIBBONS, PC 1700 TWO LOGAN SQUARE 18 th & ARCH STREETS PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103	PRIYA K. JESANI MICHAEL P. TURIELLO PRETZEL & STOUFFER, CHARTERED ONE SOUTH WACKER DRIVE SUITE 2500 CHICAGO, IL 60606
JEFFREY R THOMPSON ONEILL, PARKER & WILLIAMSON, ESQS PO BOX 217 KNOXVILLE, TN 37901-0217	MATTHEW G. CONWAY JENNIFER KATZ 818 FARMINGTON AVE WEST HARTFORD, CT 06119

<p>CHRISTOPHER E. MARTIN MORRISON MAHONEY LLP WATER VIEW PLAZA 2001 U.S. HIGHWAY 46 EAST, SUITE 200 PARSIPPANY, NJ 07054</p>	<p>ANTHONY BRAZIL DAVID J. VENDLER MEGAN S. WYNNE 1055 WEST 17TH STREET 24th FLOOR LOS ANGELES, CA 90017-2503</p>
<p>BRIAN PRESTON HEERMANCE 17 STATE STREET SUITE 110 NEW YORK, NY 10004</p>	<p>WENDI JANE FRISCH 1055 WEST SEVENTH STREET 24th FLOOR LOS ANGELES, CA 90017</p>
<p>EDWARD B. RUFF, III PRETZEL & STOUFFER, CRTD. ONE SOUTH WICKER DRIVE, SUITE 2500 CHICAGO, IL 60606-4673</p>	<p>CHRISTY COMSTOCK 21 WEST MOUNTAIN STREET SUITE 300 FAYETTEVILLE, AR 72701</p>
<p>ETHAN A. MILLER SQUIRE, SANDERS & DEMPSEY L.L.P. ONE MARITIME PLAZA, SUITE 300 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111-3492</p>	<p>NICHOLAS M. WIECZOREK MORRIS POLICH & PURDY, LLP 3980 HOWARD HUGHES PARKWAY SUITE 400 LAS VEGAS, NV 89109</p>
<p>RICHARD MARK SEGAL BARBARA L. CROUTCH PILLSBURY, WINTHROP, SHAW & PITTMAN, ESQS. 101 WEST BROADWAY SUITE 1800 SAN DIEGO, CA 92101-8219</p>	<p>AMY L. BROWN SQUIRE, SANDERS & DEMPSEY L.L.P. 1201 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W., P.O. BOX 407 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20044-0407</p>
<p>JOHN B.T. MURRAY, JR. SQUIRE, SANDERS & DEMPSEY L.L.P. 1900 PHILLIPS POINT WEST, 777 SOUTH FLAGLER DRIVE WEST PALM BEACH, FL 33401-6198</p>	<p>JOSEPH C. WEINSTEIN SQUIRE, SANDERS & DEMPSEY L.L.P. 4900 KEY TOWER, 127 PUBLIC SQUARE CLEVELAND, OHIO 44114-1304</p>
<p>MARSHALL S. NEY MITCHELL, WILLIAMS, SELIG, GATES & WOODYARD, PLLC 5414 PINNACLE POINT DRIVE SUITE 500 ROGERS, AR 72758</p>	<p>MARK C. GOODMAN SQUIRE, SANDERS & DEMPSEY L.L.P. ONE MARITIME PLAZA, SUITE 300 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111-3492</p>

SCOTT WM. WEINSTEIN MORGAN & MORGAN, P.A. 12800 UNIVERSITY DRIVE SUITE 600 P.O. BOX 9504 FORT MYERS, FL 33906	ROBIN LEA HANGER SQUIRE, SANDERS & DEMPSEY L.L.P. 200 SOUTH BISCAYNE BOULEVARD, SUITE 400 MIAMI, FL 33131-2398
ANNE C. GOODWIN SQUIRE, SANDERS & DEMPSEY L.L.P. 555 SOUTH FLOWER STREET, 31 st FLOOR LOS ANGELES, CA 90071-2300	LIZA M. WALSH TRICIA B. O'RELLY CONNELL FOLEY LLP 85 LIVINGSTON AVENUE ROSELAND, NJ 07068
CHARLES H. ABBOTT GARY L. JUSTICE WILLIAM E. WEGNER 333 S GRAND AVE, 45 th FLOOR LOS ANGELES, CA 90071-3197	BRIAN S. INAMINE 888 S FIGUEROA ST SUITE 1800 LOS ANGELES, CA 90017
CHARLES H. HORN WRIGHT, ROBINSON, OSTHIMER & TATUM 44 MONTGOMERY ST 18 th FLOOR SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94104-4705	RICHARD FAMA JOHN JOSEPH McDONOUGH 45 BROADWAY ATRIUM 16 th FLOOR NEW YORK, NY 10006
JOHN F. MULLEN COZEN O'CONNOR 1900 MARKET STREET PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103	JOHN J. McDONOUGH COZEN O'CONNOR, LLP 45 BROADWAY ATRIUM SUITE 1600 NEW YORK, NY 10006
STEVEN L. RODRIGUEZ 425 CALIFORNIA STREET SUITE 2400 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94104	JEAN M. LAWLER GINAE.OCH CHASE PLAZA 801 S. GRAND AVE., 9 th FL LOS ANGELES, CA 90017-4624
JOHN H. ALEXANDER JOHN H. ALEXANDER & ASSOCIATES 100 WEST MONROE STREET SUITE 2100 CHICAGO, IL 60603	BRIAN R. CUNHA BRIAN CUNHA & ASSOCIATES 311 PINE STREET FALL RIVER, MA 02720

THOMAS M. FERLAUTO KING & FERLAUTO 1880 CENTURY PARK EAST SUITE 820 LOS ANGELES, CA 90067-1627	LUIS GUILLERMO FIGUEROA ATTORNEYS TRIAL GROUP 540 NORTH SEMORAN BLVD. ORLANDO, FL 32807
JACK MICHAEL FRIBLEY FAEGRE & BENSON, LLP 90 SOUTH SEVENTH STREET SUITE 2200 MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55402-3901	ROBERT B. GERARD GERARD & OSUCH, LLP 2840 SOUTH JONES BOULEVARD BUILDING D, SUITE 4 LAS VEGAS, NV 89146
PATRICK J. GOSS ROSE LAW FIRM 120 EAST FOURTH STREET LITTLE ROCK, AR 72201	BRADLEY DAVID HERGOTT SCANDAGLJA & RYAN 55 EAST MONROE STREET SUITE 3930 CHICAGO, IL 60603
MICK D. HODGES HODGES LAW OFFICE P.C. 163 2 nd AVENUE WEST P.O. BOX 3088 TWIN FALLS, ID 83303-5298	WILLIAM GENE HORTON NOLAN, CADDELL & REYNOLDS, P.A. 122 NORTH 11 th STREET P.O. BOX 184 FORT SMITH, AR 72902-0184
MICHAEL S. KREIDLER STICH, ANGELL, KREIDLER & DODGE, P.A. THE CROSSINGS, SUITE 120 250 SECOND AVENUE SOUTH MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55401	GARY E. MASON MASON LAW FIRM, P.C. 1225 19 th STREET, N.W. SUITE 500 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
EDWARD T. MATTHEWS FREDRIKSON & BRYON 200 SOUTH 6 th STREET SUITE 4000 MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55402-1425	WILLIAM M. O'MARA BRIAN O'MARA O'MARA LAW FIRM, P.C. 311 EAST LIBERTY STREET RENO, NV 89501
BEHRAM V. PAREKH KIRTLAND & PACKARD, LLP 2361 ROSECRANS BLVD. 4th FLOOR EL SEGUNDO, CA 90245-4923	TERRY M. POYNTER POYNER LAW OFFICES P.O. BOX 370 MOUNTAIN HOME, AR 72654-0370
EUGENE R. RICHARD WAYNE RICHARD & HURWITZ, LLP ONE BOSTON PLACE SUITE 3620 BOSTON, MA 02108	CHARLES W. SPANN PERRY & SPANN 6130 PLUMAS STREET RENO, NV 89509

<p>STEPHEN R. THOMAS MOFFATT, THOMAS, BARRETT, ROCK & FIELDS, CHTD. P.O. BOX 829 BOISE, MD 83701</p>	<p>ADAM T. WASKOWSKI LORD, BISSELL & BROOK, LLP 111 SOUTH WACKER DRIVE CHICAGO, IL 60606</p>
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